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The cultural project for the inclusive Metropolitan City

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Abstract

To design an inclusive metropolitan context leads to configure actions, thoughts, links between space and society based on a holistic and integrated approach to development and optimization of the urban and social capital. It means exploring the relationships between the cultural maturity of the communities involved and the degree of safety/security, accessibility, mobility and quality of public places with their new metropolitan significance.

The conceptual elaboration, the best practices and the competences of national and international supervisors, lead to the definition of a framework that positively affects the project for the Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria. The aim of the planning criteria is to create a joint project (taking into account urban planning, economic, and social aspects) pursuing a higher spatial quality that makes it possible to manage the resources (material and human) in a more sensible way and in tune with the dynamics of development.

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1. Society and inclusion

To design an inclusive metropolitan context above all means to explore the relations between the cultural maturity of the communities involved, with their urban and social heritage, and the level of safety, accessibility, mobility, and quality of public places in the new metropolitan perspective.

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The relations between the society and its potential for inclusion are mutable over time and today are more than ever interesting because it is useless to go on dealing with city project design if the issue of quality of communities, in terms of cultural level, is neglected. In fact it is necessary to wonder what the city's requirements should be so that learning is encouraged and a new interest is discovered in culture at all ages as well as in how the urban life can foster inclusion processes either coping with preexisting segregation walls or ruling out the creation of new ones from the start. More than ever today we must be able to go beyond the assumptions made until now to comprehend if a real integration exists when people live their lives parallelly and even citizens whose three-four generations have lived in the city are totally extraneous to its essence. It is time we reflected on the opportunities missed owing to the unsolved question of the increasingly evident separation between public and private spaces, that is absolutely neat.

A clearly recognizable trend in urban project design for the improvement of the social patrimony usually calls for a deep insight into the nature of the relations between space and society, between cultural maturity of the communities involved and the quality level of public places that is preserved and reinvented over time, before a decision is made. The idea that the learned city must draw on the promotion of its resources and a profound knowledge as well as a full urban awareness, are key to an urban government according to a view of spread knowledge as overall and collective long-term well-being, is prevailing (Castells 2010). Over the last few years the qualification of Italian city of culture was established to spur improvement processes that were fostered only on a European scale and 'strengthen project design awareness'. Through the promotion of cultural, landscape, and environmental heritage, and the development of cultural and creative industries the urban/social regeneration and renovation acquire a durable and sustainable character while 'the cultural development becomes a driver of economic progress and social cohesion'.

In the same light the urban planning research, increasingly focused on the study of the qualitative effects of the urban policies (Paquot 2010) is paying special attention to the transformations brought about by the migration flows across the Euro-Mediterranean zone to study what influence is determined and determinable on the culture of dwelling and living in public, semi-public, and private spaces. The current debate on the contemporary city is aimed at spotting the opportunities to upgrade the urban quality standards, offered by the melting-pot of different cultures (including different dwelling habits) and by the variety of expressions characterizing the multi-ethnic society.

Interculturality is the key word today: cities are planned for the needs of a new society (Sen 2000) embracing many peoples, histories, traditions, and identities. Europe and the Mediterranean countries are settings of increasingly large migrations that deeply affect the social structure and the spatial use in a way that is hardly comprehensible and represents a major challenge for management. The worst results are social conflict and urban degradation that can be coped with only by means of new urban planning policies/tools that take into account the social and cultural integration and are geared to effectively tackle more complex problems (Sennet 1999).

From this standpoint public spaces play a fundamental role not only as connections of an urban layout but above all as relational poles (Augè 2010) where the collective identities can be represented: the spaces for social interaction, relationships, worship, and meditation including markets, squares, gardens, etc. more than others embody the vocation of the city in terms of intercultural space and therefore can better suit for welcoming needs. The Mediterranean market concept can suitably synthesize the idea of interculturality as even if it is based on a standardized and recurrent pattern it involves diversity not meant as cause of conflict but rather as mosaic of cultures contributing together to the vision of new cities.

Also the European policies over the last decade have been focused on the city owing both to the new role it is playing and the processes affecting the major and minor urban settlements. Special efforts were taken to find new models and tools of intervention aimed at managing the complexity of the contemporary city. All the EU programmes are designed to guarantee a sustainable regional development conceived in a unitary way and at the same time as a harmonization of different social habits, pursuing the relevant aims such as social cohesion and equality, competition and growth, safeguard and upgrade of environmental resources.

Since the new network of the metropolitan city is taking shape, the search for increasingly sophisticated urban qualities in terms of personal growth of citizens and more welcoming cities through experimentation with various urban patterns related to different cultures on a global scale, is more urgent. Urban parks such as Copenhagen *Superkilen* are examples of a new approach according to which urban integration is grounded into the respect and admiration for foreign civilizations.

Thus, a city can have an educational function in its places as open and ever renewable teaching places. It can be simultaneously theatre and subject for new stories and experiences.

Education confined to a specific lifespan is replaced by lifelong learning involving each citizen in an uninterrupted flux of free-access knowledge. This general pedagogic assumption is the precondition for the more specific disciplinary perspective with regard to project design teaching as well as high standards of methods, experiences, projects, implementations related to a narrative interpretation of urban fabrics (Secchi 2013).

Every single intervention carried out by either each developer, or project designer, or urban planner, or builder, for the existing city should be in tune with the latter's most intrinsic rationale. If the city is the place where 'things happen', today more than ever successful city planning depends on the ability to make things happen and adapt to the new behaviors and needs of citizens.

Cities are more and more often urged to be flexible in their adaptation to the practical necessities of local citizens and communities. This generates a tough competition among cities which to guarantee flexibility and pluralization of the urban offer promote their image and their capacity of organizing events.

The fundamental precondition for the success of these strategies is the implementation of ad hoc initiatives geared to promote and preserve natural, historical, cultural, and landscape resources. Consequently, there is an increasingly stringent need to plan space taking into account the history and the identity of place pursuing enjoyability/usability, accessibility, and safety/security. Nevertheless the real novelty lies in the new relation between the citizen and their city, mirrored by the consistency coagulating culture and urban expression.

The special place for this experimentation is the material city, the overall preexisting city as complex to highlight through processes of new project design and semantic renovation.

The reuse becomes a both critical and creative response to the new culture that tends to subtract value and significance to things. Therefore, it is a sign of the actual transformation mirrored by citizens' desires and at the same time brings to the fore major issues pertaining to the balance between transformation and original identity. Many reuse projects, in fact, aims at creating new spaces such as public spaces, connections linking urban elements, new relational spaces with formal and functional characteristics that build a sense of belonging and make the place.

2. The perceived boundaries

Segregation is the social effect ensuing from the creation of visible and invisible boundaries that serve to keep a certain social distance. These geographies of exclusion (Sibley 1998) envisage either privileged spaces of elites' self-isolation or compartmented neighborhoods inhabited by groups that can unconsciously suffer a segregation condition.

The settlement processes within the cities are uninterrupted and intense, well-off classes keep distance from the less affluent ones which wish to move to luxurious houses but fail to do it owing to the high prices. The integration is historically very difficult and some social groups tend to keep away the others due to the degradation effect occurring either when less rich social groups move to residential neighborhoods or when real estate prices and cost of living rise as is the case of affordable housing areas that after renovation interventions become fashionable and attractive for other social classes. *Russafa* neighborhood in Valencia turned into a *bohémien* area with cultural activities, exhibitions, a lot of public exercises where to stay and read a book, putting behind itself its fame as rough district thanks to renovation and semantic reconstruction laboratories. In few years the *Quadrilatero Romano* in Turin and the *Navigli* area in Milan became brisk districts, full of dining outside tables attracting youth, intellectuals, artists in the evening and at the weekends. Then some urban villages (Magnaghi 1989) exist where life habits are very peculiar and completely different from the rest of the city; they are like small identitarian built-up areas with particular social rules and lifestyles. Neighborhoods such as Belleville, with its alleys and steep slopes as well as its lively atmosphere created by people animated by a passion for culture. As one more example, *Fauborg-Montmartre* with its *Rue Bleu*, renowned thanks to Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt with the sixteen-year-old Jew who became the Arab of the food store inherited by Monsieur Ibrahim, his adoptive father, represents the other Paris and at the same time confirms its more intrinsic identity.

These social fabrics, very richly interwoven, stem from a harmonious fusion and an attitude for exchanges leading to the successful integration of different cultures, life habits and styles. The course of events has generated

that yeast of the city nurtured by the coexistence of different cultures. Anyway, French cities were also characterized by the banlieues, very large districts developed round the Sixties, without any social services, where first-generation North-African immigrants were located and accepted to live without protest because they actually had no choice but in most cases because they were unaware of their segregation situation. The second and third generation of them are fully aware of the significance of those districts also because the seriousness of the capitalistic economic crisis on an international scale worsen their social conditions due to social services cuts and unemployment. The perception of the urban space does not depend only on the structural and social-environmental qualities but also on the level of integration of the immigrants, often hindered by differences in culture, lifestyle (Sennet 2003), and the awareness of sharp social inequalities. All these factors accentuate the sense of extraneity that the previous generation immigrants rapidly coped with, lured by new economic well-being.

The spatialization of the community in the western countries is very different from the Mediterranean areas' one, which brings about hardly solvable urban conflicts. If it is true that some urban policies underlain by a multicultural ethic rationale are sufficient to harmonize the different ways of inhabiting and using the public space through a synthesis that can turn into a point of strength for a district, some issues such as the accentuated spatialization related to gender inequality pursued by Muslim people, is in no way disputable in the view of the Europeans who overcame it only after centuries of struggle. Today the generally accepted standpoint is the idea that there are many ways of interpreting the public space. Yet, although the Western view cannot excessively predominate anymore, gender equality must absolutely be protected as it is the result of a long, and not yet ended, cultural process. The significance of a place embodies some social values considered non-negotiable by its community (Olivetti 2015).

Segregation also means to limit the access to places and information in such a way that the feeling of uneasiness increases.

With regard to large cities mobility should be facilitated through the multiplication of centralities as long as they are suitably connected to one another by good public transport.

The homogeneity of the city boundaries would avert the dispersive creation of amorphous settlements that leads to higher transport fares and car-dependency. Urban areas discover a new interest in the criterion of the mix of functions related to dwelling, productivity, and services, that makes it possible to reduce journey distances and the so called mobility of necessity. Besides, there is a tendency to formalize the criterion of weighed localization of the basic activities depending on the need of public transport and road transport of goods. Higher densities should be located either next to stations and public transport connection nodes, or along the corridors of the main public transport directrices.

The steps aimed at encouraging public transport use above all tend to make public transport faster than personal cars – more capillary service, dedicated lanes, preferential traffic lights rules, rendezvous, efficient interchanges. Moreover, accessibility is improved thanks to the better design of the bus stops, the safety of pedestrian and bike lanes, and the renovation of the transport means. Finally, the draw-up of a services organization chart simplifies the integration of different modes providing accurate information on frequencies, timetables, waiting times, and related parking areas.

In many cities a lot of investments are being made in high capacity public transport innovation envisaging the use of tram networks and surface level systems, as well as in on call services with low environmental impact to meet the weak demand.

Nowadays it is necessary to comprehensively rethink urban mobility in tune with a new form of well-being paradoxically related to the different aspects of austerity that becomes a spur for improvement of city life and citizens health. The spaces used in an unsuitable way are freed so that public space is renovated, exchanges are revitalized and cultural, historical, and natural resources are made more attractive. Moreover, alternative initiatives must be put forward to build citizens awareness and spread a real culture on more sensible and sustainable mobility options. In this sense there is an urgent need to improve life standards also from the relational, cultural, and economic standpoint without laying aside some basic rules of civil society that a profound reflection on the city cannot ignore. Briefly, the aim is to create an opportunity of lifestyles change.



Fig. 1. Reggio Calabria and the Strait from the Baden Powell Park

3. Reggio Calabria (Italy), an inclusive Metropolitan City

Reggio Calabria Metropolitan City over the next few years will be able to drive effective tools of strategic programming and planning geared to improve the social and cultural conditions like in the most successful European transformations experienced over the last decade by Barcelona, Valencia, Lyon, Paris, Munich, Amsterdam, and Stockholm. The sensible identification of the better resources, timing, stakeholders, and implementation strategies by taking advantage of local project designers, and a shared view on the potentials and prospects for growth of the areas involved, were key issues. It was demonstrated that advanced mobility services result from multilevel governance procedures designed to guarantee efficient local services as well as direct access to larger scale metropolitan services thanks to innovative, comfortable, fast, and frequent connections.

New opportunities are being funded, such as the PON Metro (Metro National Operation Plan) and the ‘European Straits’ Network initiative, exclusively for these new cities/Authorities for a better spatial planning. Therefore, now it is crucial to be able to imagine a model of metropolitan city and area for the design of a Metropolitan Strategic Plan within the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund.

The Metropolitan Statute will be able to envisage that through the overall orchestration of its plans and tools the rules, actions, and resources are identified for a new process that on a larger urban scale affects the whole territory of the former province and involves the transformation and reuse of large underused areas, abandoned works, workshops, shops, and railways, the renovation and reuse of the existing patrimony, and the adoption of safety measures. The new organizational scheme for the metropolitan city – defining metropolitan functions, provincial functions, functions delegated by the national and regional governments, relationships involving Communes and groups of Communes – should foresee the streamlining of the governance processes targeted at the best management of the proximity issues in order to meet the new quality requirements of the urban space inhabited by a multiracial society and face the increasingly hard challenges posed by social and cultural heterogeneity.

Some major issues to set on the agenda are environment, parks, economic growth, community services, public transport, soil consumption reduction, and better settlement regulation, in order to pursue both the improvement of urban lifestyle and the soil defense to mitigate soil instability risk.

The metropolitan city is assigned all the functions pertaining to the environmental and soil defence, including the management of the metropolitan-scale civil protection system.

The items of seismic risk prevention and community-driven environmental defence are crucial to Reggio Calabria Metropolitan City and its integrated Area of the Straits.

Besides, a big laboratory that creates monitoring and survey networks, and organizes information and educational campaigns targeted at the population that thanks to the relevant theoretical and practical knowledge can be less vulnerable to seismic risk, can be figured out.

The pending earthquake threat can lead to shape and organize spaces in a most performative way so that the perception of safety and careful prevention is deservedly given to a society that keeps reasserting everlasting love to its homeland.

The issues pertaining to the reduction of uncontrolled settlements are closely linked to the effectiveness of local public transport policies at metropolitan level. In fact the areas that are well connected to metropolitan services are densely populated as they are not severely marginalized, unlike Reggio Calabria hinterland areas, and their decentralization becomes advantageous in terms of settlement opportunities and easy commuting.

The preservation and promotion of the existing economic activities, the support to the tourism sector where a plurality of characters synthesizes natural and environmental values (the *Aspromonte* massif, the chain of *Peloritani* mountains and the Straits awaiting UNESCO recognition) as well as historical and cultural attractions of Reggio Calabria that must unlock its potential to attract the visitors of its National Museum who for the time being are only interested in the *Riace Bronzes* and neglect all the archeological, thermal, and, generally speaking, cultural patrimony scattered all over the Ionian and Tyrrhenian areas.

To integrate the cultural offer through some joint initiatives such as theatre events would highlight an invaluable heritage. The City of the Straits neither is getting larger nor is incorporating other cities; it is rather a city featuring a solid and liquid road network and an, even visual, interplay of major urban areas that are well integrated and re-traced in a more complex territorial entity.

Feeling oneself citizen of the Straits is a mental condition, a sense of belonging to an unusual and extraordinary place that is a cradle of natural patrimony, culture, and human relations. Though, at the same time it needs upgrading interventions in the social, economic and urban planning sectors more than other places. These interventions depend on the efficiency and fluidity of accessibility, connection systems and mobility between the two shores of the Straits. The frequency of the connections, the overall accessibility and 24-hour services encourage mobility between the two shores to seize complementary cultural, education, health, and commercial opportunities. The establishment of the metropolitan city of the Straits cannot help aiming at these fundamental performances within a project, shared and pursued by the two cities of the Straits, tailor-made to promote a network of cultural and relational resources from the standpoint of a boost to tourism and hospitality of both provinces.

Lastly, a preference for laboratories, consistent with a precise method, already experimented within previous experiences, would facilitate an active, aware, and sensible democratic participation of citizens in the decision-making process. In this wake some active laboratories are being started with the aim of drawing up pilot projects under the aegis of the Department of social and EU policies of Reggio Calabria City Council to highlight the experience of the villages of excellence originating from the idea that cities and their surrounding areas can dramatically contribute to the processes shaping the overall project for the inclusive metropolitan city.

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